

NW Lawmakers Seek National Heritage Area Designation for Mouth of the Columbia (May 25, 2006)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird (D-WA) and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) today introduced companion legislation in the Senate and House that will begin the process of establishing a National Heritage Area for land in Pacific, Wahkiakum, Clatsop, and Columbia counties at the mouth of Columbia River. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Congressman David Wu (D-OR) are original cosponsors of the bill.

"This designation will bring home millions of federal dollars to help promote our region's tourism industry, helping create jobs and strengthening our local economy," said Congressman Baird. "The beautiful, historically and culturally significant areas at the mouth of the Columbia River will also be united through the designation."

National Heritage Areas unite disparate parts of a historically and culturally significant area under a common purpose. The Northwest lawmakers' legislation, the Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area Study Act, will authorize the National Park Service and local stakeholders to conduct a feasibility study of the proposed area - the first step that Congress must take to establish a National Heritage Area. The study, which can take up to three years, will examine a number of elements including whether the proposed area has natural, historic, cultural, educational, scenic, or recreational resources that are important to our nation's heritage.

"The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial reminded us of the glittering historic gems in Oregon's northwestern corner," Senator Smith said. "I want to capture that momentum with the countless other stories to tell, such as those of Native Americans, John Jacob Astor, and the Hudson's Bay Company. We also have a living heritage in our fisheries, forest products industry and others that have endured for over a hundred years."

Once the feasibility study is complete, the lawmakers will introduce new legislation to officially designate the land as a National Heritage Area. After the designation passes the House and Senate and is signed into law, local and regional stakeholders must develop a management plan for the area. The Secretary of the Interior will then approve the management plan, making the National Heritage Area eligible for \$10 million over 15 years. The National Park Service will oversee the Heritage Area.

"The mouth of the Columbia River includes areas that are rich in history, heritage and culture. A national heritage area will help celebrate that rich history and share it with visitors from across the country," Senator Murray said.

There are 24 National Heritage Areas across the country. Baird, Smith, Murray, and Wu are working to secure the first National Heritage Area on the West Coast. The lawmakers have worked closely with Lewis and Clark National Park Superintendent Chip Jenkins, Pacific County Friend of Lewis and Clark Board Member Carolyn Glenn, Washington State Historical Society's Jim Sayce, and with representatives from the Long Beach Peninsula Visitor's Bureau, the Port of Peninsula, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, the Columbia River Estuary Study Task Force, and local business and civic leaders.

For years, the Oregon and Washington delegations have worked together to preserve the beauty of the Columbia River," said Congressman Wu. "Designating the mouth of the river as a National Heritage Area is another way to ensure future generations can enjoy this natural wonder and learn about its historical and cultural significance."

Congressman Baird wrote the bill that established the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park at the mouth of the Columbia River as well as the law that preserved portions of the Upper White Salmon River. Congressman Baird also co-founded the congressional National Parks Caucus and has introduced legislation to increase funding for national park maintenance and natural and cultural preservation projects.

Congressman Baird with local business and civic leaders who are working to help secure the National Heritage Area designation. From left to right: local business owner Gayle Borchad, Director of the Ilwaco Heritage Museum Nancy Olsen, civic leader Karen Snyder, Executive Director of Destination The Pacific Cyndi Mudge, Washington State Historical Society's Jim Sayce, and Congressman Baird.